



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



I am Jim Howard.  
I am a Conservationist.

## Jim Howard

District Conservationist - San Mateo County

**Conservation Planning Status:**  
Certified Planner

**Year Started with NRCS:** 2005

**Positions Held:** District Conservationist.

**Educational Background:** Humboldt State University: Bachelor's Degree in Forest Management with one-year special studies in Limnology at the University of Uppsala, Sweden; Duke University: Master of Environmental Management, Water Resources.

**Why did you choose a career with NRCS?**

Honestly, the winds of fate just blew me this way. I've always followed an open path unconstrained by restrictive career goals, other than knowing I need to do work that makes the world a better place. I have a broad range of experience that helps me understand natural systems function and management. I think that gives me a unique

ability to help people meet their conservation goals on the land they manage, especially in such a diverse landscape as the Central Coast of California. The NRCS provides the perfect opportunity to accomplish this. I love this agency. I love our mission. I love how we do what we do: Helping People Help the Land.

**"I love getting to know a wide range of people on diverse landscapes and ... help them do the right thing for the land."**

**Why is conserving natural resources important to you?**

I care deeply about the environment that sustains us, how we manage our natural resources, how we coexist with our natural environment, and what we leave behind for those who follow.

**Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service  
California**



# I am a Conservationist

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## **What has been your favorite part about working for NRCS?**

I love getting to know a wide range of people on diverse landscapes, and to share with them my technical expertise and the resources of the NRCS to help them do the right thing for the land.

## **Why do you think conservation planning is an important aspect of what you do for landowners?**

Natural resources management is an incredibly complex thing. It can be overwhelming for a land manager, at any scale. The NRCS Conservation Planning model is an amazing tool to help folks organize their goals and priorities and systematically understand and address their challenges. It's a powerful communication tool that fosters understanding between the planner and the land manager, through time and the changes brought by time.

## **What is your favorite memory of your conservation planning experience?**

My favorites have been when the planning process convinced a land manager NOT to do something they really thought they wanted to do. Sometimes folks have a

vision they want to force upon a piece of land that will not support it. The systematic assessment of resource conditions can illuminate obstacles and potential problems that make the cost/benefit too high and expose a pre-conceived plan as contrary to their conservation goals.

## **What would you say to an employee in the process of becoming a certified planner?**

Always remember that the relationship is the most important thing. Building a relationship of trust and understanding with the decision-maker is the most powerful part of the process. And be patient. Sometimes it takes people a while to make a decision. That's their prerogative. It's their land.

## **Any advice for apprentice planners?**

Be humble. Know the limits of your knowledge, and don't be afraid to admit them to yourself and to others.



**Want to learn more  
about the Conservation  
Stewardship Program?**

[nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill](https://nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill)

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